

Ha Tien Proposed Nature Reserve

Alternative site name(s)

Ha Tien plain

Province(s)

Kien Giang

Status

Proposed

Management board established

No

Latitude

10°20' - 10°29'N

Longitude

104°32' - 104°39'E

Bio-unit

05a - Mekong Delta



Conservation status

Ha Tien is a 6,981 ha area situated east of Ha Tien town. The site was proposed as a nature reserve by BirdLife and IEBR, following their project to identify key sites for wetland conservation in the Mekong Delta (Buckton *et al.* 1999). Ha Tien has been included on a proposed list of protected areas currently being prepared by FPD and FIPI (FPD and FIPI in prep.).

Topography and hydrology

Ha Tien proposed nature reserve is situated in the north-west of the Ha Tien plain, a flat coastal plain, which is one of the last remaining extensive areas of seasonally inundated grassland in the Mekong Delta. The plain slopes gently towards the Gulf of Thailand, as a result of which floodwater can easily drain away, and the area is only inundated to a depth of 1.5 to 2 m during the flood season. The soils in the area have a high acid-sulphate content, which means that the land is marginal for agriculture (Buckton *et al.* 1999).

Biodiversity value

Ha Tien proposed nature reserve supports a mixture of grassland, naturally regenerating *Melaleuca* scrub and *Nypa fruticans* swamp. The grassland is a natural

vegetation type, which is seasonally inundated. The grassland is dominated by a species-poor *Eleocharis dulcis* community, which forms the most extensive area. *E. dulcis* is sometimes the only species occurring, although *Cyperus halpan*, *C. polystachyos*, *Philydrum lanuginosum* and *Murdannia giganteum* also occur frequently (Buckton *et al.* 1999).

The *Melaleuca* scrub consists of trees 2 to 6 m tall but which can locally reach 10 to 12 m. The composition of the ground flora varies according to soil and water conditions but often includes *Eleocharis dulcis*, *Phragmites vallatoria*, *Xyris indica*, *Melastoma affine*, *Flagellaria indica*. In some areas *Paspalum vaginatum*, *Pandanus kaida* and the fern *Acrostichum aureum* are found (Buckton *et al.* 1999).

Swamp vegetation, dominated by the aquatic palm *Nypa fruticans*, is distributed in the brackish water zone. Associated species include *Acanthus ebracteatus*, *Derris trifolia*, *Clerodendrum inerme*, *Phoenix paludosa*, *Acrostichum aureum*, *Aglaodora griffithii* and *Cyperus malaccensis* (Buckton *et al.* 1999).

Ha Tien proposed nature reserve supports one of the last areas of suitable habitat for the globally endangered Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis* in the Mekong Delta; remains of a single Bengal Florican were found in the vicinity in 1997 (Tran Triet *et al.* in press). After interviewing local people during visits to the site in 1999, Buckton *et al.* (1999)

concluded that it is likely that the species still occurs at the site. The only other currently known location for this species in Vietnam is Tram Chim National Park in Dong Thap province (Eames 1995). The population at Tram Chim is, however, very small and, if significant numbers still exist in the Ha Tien plain, this may be the only viable population of the species remaining in Vietnam (Buckton *et al.* 1999).

Conservation issues

There are currently no conservation activities being implemented at Ha Tien proposed nature reserve. The seasonally inundated grassland at the site (the key habitat for Bengal Florican) is under severe and immediate threat of conversion to rice agriculture and forestry. Most of the large remaining grassland areas are currently earmarked for resettlement and agricultural conversion. However, the acid-sulphate soils in the area make most of the plain unsuitable for rice agriculture, and there is a real risk, therefore, that the last remaining areas of extensive seasonally inundated grassland in the Mekong Delta will be lost to provide marginal agricultural land capable of producing meagre rice crops of less than one tonne per hectare per year (Buckton *et al.* 1999).

Other documented values

Close to the proposed nature reserve is Ha Tien town, a famous tourist resort. Ha Tien town has many tourist attractions besides the attraction of swimming in the sea, and tourism infrastructure is already well developed. In the future, it may be able to develop Ha Tien proposed nature reserve as a site for bird watching and environmental education (Nguyen Duc Tu pers. comm.).

Related projects

Kien Giang Provincial People's Committee established a joint venture together with a Taiwanese Company. This joint venture, which was called Kien Tai, managed 60,000 ha of production forest, including 33,868 ha in Ha Tien district. The joint venture planted *Eucalyptus* sp. and *Melaleuca* sp. but was financially ruined because the scheme was unsuccessful. However, the joint venture retains land tenure for some

of the most conservation important areas of the Ha Tien plain, and a solution to this problem has yet to be found (Nguyen Duc Tu pers. comm.).

Literature sources

Buckton, S. T., Nguyen Cu, Ha Quy Quynh and Nguyen Duc Tu (1999) [The conservation of key wetland sites in the Mekong Delta](#). Hanoi: BirdLife International Vietnam Programme.

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Eames, J. C. (1995) The Bengal Florican *Eupodotis bengalensis* in Indochina. Forktail 11: 39-46.

Lao Dong Newspaper (2000) [Establishment of a wetland protected area at Ha Tien is essential for the ecosystem and communities]. Lao Dong [Labour] 21 July 2000. In Vietnamese.

Tran Triet, Safford, R. J., Duong Van Ni and Maltby, E. (in press) Wetland biodiversity overlooked and threatened in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam: grassland ecosystems in the Ha Tien plain. Tropical Biodiversity.